

The School of Obedience

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3. The Secret of True Obedience

'Yet learned He obedience.' -Hebrews 5:8.

The secret of true obedience - let me say at once what I believe it to be - is the clear and close personal relationship to GOD. All our attempts after full obedience will be failures until we get access to His abiding fellowship. It is GOD's holy presence, consciously abiding with us, that keeps us from disobeying Him.

Defective obedience is always the result of a defective life. To rouse and spur on that defective life by arguments and motives has its use, but their chief blessing must be that they make us feel the need of a different life, a life so entirely under the power of GOD that obedience will be its natural outcome. The defective life, the life of broken and irregular fellowship with GOD, must be healed, and make way for a full and healthy life; then full obedience will become possible. The secret of a true obedience is the return to close and continual fellowship with GOD.

'Yet learned He obedience' (Hebrews 5:8). And why was this needful? And what is the blessing He brings us? Listen, *'yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.'*

Suffering is unnatural to us, and therefore calls for the surrender of our will.

CHRIST needed suffering that in it He might learn to obey and give up His will to the Father at any cost.

He needed to learn obedience that as our great High Priest He might be made perfect. He learned obedience, He became obedient unto death, that He might become the author of our salvation. He became the author of salvation through obedience, that He might save those *'that obey Him.'*

As obedience was with Him absolutely necessary to procure, it is with us absolutely necessary to inherit, salvation. The very essence of salvation is - obedience to GOD. CHRIST as the obedient One saves us as His obedient ones.

Obedience is what the heart of CHRIST is set upon.

On earth CHRIST was a learner in the school of obedience; in Heaven He teaches it to His disciples here on earth. In a world where disobedience reigns unto death, the restoration of

obedience is in CHRIST's hands. As in His own life, so in us, He has undertaken to maintain it. He teaches and works it in us.

Let us try and think what and how He teaches: it may be we shall see how little we have given ourselves to be pupils in this school, where alone obedience is to be learnt. When we think of an ordinary school, the principal things we ask often are,- (1) the teacher, (2) the class-books, (3) the pupils. Let us see what each of these is in CHRIST's school of obedience.

I. THE TEACHER

'Yet learned He obedience.' And now that He teaches it, He does so first and most by unfolding the secret of His own obedience to the Father.

I have said that the power of true obedience is to be found in the clear personal relationship to GOD. It was so with our Lord JESUS. Of all His teaching He said, ***'I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak.'***

This does not mean that CHRIST received GOD's commandment in eternity as part of the Father's commission to Him on entering the world. No. Day by day, each moment as He taught and worked, He lived, as man, in continual communication with the Father, and received the Father's instructions just as He needed them. Does He not say, ***'The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do... for the Father.. sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth; and He will shew Him greater works,' 'As I hear, I judge,' 'I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me,' 'The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me'?*** It is everywhere a dependence upon a present fellowship and operation of GOD, a hearing and a seeing of what GOD speaks and does and shows.

Our Lord ever spoke of His relation to the Father as the type and the promise of our relation to Him, and to the Father through Him. With us as with Him, the life of continual obedience is impossible without continual fellowship and continual teaching. It is only when GOD comes into our lives, in a degree and a power which many never consider possible, when His presence as the Eternal and Ever-present One is believed and received, even as the Son believed and received it, that there can be any hope of a life in which every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of CHRIST.

The imperative need of the continual receiving our orders and instructions from GOD Himself is what is implied in the words:

OBEY MY VOICE, AND I WILL BE YOUR GOD.'

The expression *'obeying the commandments'* is very seldom used in Scripture; it is almost always obeying *Me*, or obeying or hearkening to *My* voice. With the commander of an army, the teacher of a school, the father of a family, it is not the code of laws, however clear and good, with its rewards or threats, that secures true obedience; it is

THE PERSONAL LIVING INFLUENCE,

wakening love and enthusiasm. It is the joy of ever hearing the Father's voice that will give the joy and the strength of true obedience. It is the voice gives power to obey the word; the word without the living voice does not avail.

How clearly this is illustrated by the contrast of what we see in Israel. The people had heard the voice of GOD on Sinai, and were afraid. They asked Moses that GOD might no more speak to them. Let Moses receive the Word of GOD and bring it to them. They only thought of the commands; they knew not that the only power to obey is in the presence of GOD and His voice speaking to us. And so with only Moses to speak to them, and the tables of stone, their whole history is one of disobedience, because they were afraid of direct contact with GOD.

It is even so still. Many, many Christians find it so much easier to take their teaching from godly men than to wait upon GOD to receive it from Himself. Their faith stands in the wisdom of men, and not in the power of GOD.

Do let us learn the great lesson our Lord, who '*learned... obedience*' by every moment waiting to see and hear the Father, has to teach us. It is only when, like Him, with Him, in and through Him, we ever walk with GOD, and hear His voice, that we can possibly attempt to offer GOD the obedience He asks and promises to work.

Out of the depths of His own life and experience, CHRIST can give and teach us this. Pray earnestly that GOD may show you the folly of attempting to obey without the same strength CHRIST needed, may make you willing to give up everything for the Christlike joy of the Father's presence all the day.

II. THE TEXT-BOOK

CHRIST's direct communication with the Father did not render Him independent of Holy Scripture.

In the divine school of obedience there is but one text-book, whether for the Elder Brother or the younger children. In His learning obedience He used the same text-book as we have. Not only when He had to teach or to convince others did He appeal to the Word - He needed it and He used it for His own spiritual life and guidance.

From the commencement of His public life to its close He lived by the Word of GOD. '*It is written*' was the sword of the Spirit with which He conquered Satan. '*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me*': this word of Scripture was the consciousness with which He opened His preaching of the gospel. '*That the Scripture might be fulfilled*' was the light in which He accepted all suffering, and even gave Himself to the death. After the resurrection He expounded to the disciples '*in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*'

In Scripture He had found GOD's plan and path for Him marked out. He gave Himself to fulfill it. It was in and with the use of GOD's Word that He received the Father's continual direct teaching.

In GOD's school of obedience the **Bible** is the only text-book. That shows us the disposition in which we are to come to the Bible - with the simple desire in it to find what is written concerning us as to GOD's will, and to do it.

Scripture was not written to increase our knowledge but to guide our conduct; *'that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.'* *'If any man will do His will, he shall know.'*

Learn from CHRIST to consider all there is in Scripture of the revelation of GOD, and His love, and His counsel, as simply auxiliary to GOD's great end: that the man of GOD may be fitted to do His will, as it is done in Heaven; that man may be restored to that perfect obedience on which GOD's heart is set, and which alone is blessedness.

In GOD's school of obedience GOD's Word is the only text-book. To apply that Word in His own life and conduct, to know when each different portion was to be taken up and carried out, CHRIST needed and received a divine teaching. It is He who speaks in Isaiah, *'The Lord God... wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned; the Lord God hath opened Mine ear.'*

Even so does He who thus learned obedience teach it us, by giving us the HOLY SPIRIT in our heart as the divine Interpreter of the Word. This is the great work of the indwelling HOLY SPIRIT - to draw the Word we read and think upon into our heart, and make it quick and powerful there, so that GOD's living Word may work effectually in our will, our love, our whole being. It is because this is not understood that the Word has no power to work obedience.

Let me try and speak very plainly about this. We rejoice in increased attention given to Bible study, and in testimonies as to the interest awakened and benefit received. But let us not deceive ourselves. We may delight in studying the Bible; we may admire and be charmed with the views we get of GOD's truth; the thoughts suggested may make a deep impression and waken the most pleasing religious emotions; and yet the practical influence in making us holy or humble, loving, patient, ready either for service or suffering, be very small. The one reason for this is that we do not receive the Word, as it is in very deed, as the Word of the living GOD, who must Himself speak to us, and into us, if it is to exert its divine power.

The letter of the Word, however we study and delight in it, has no saving or sanctifying power. Human wisdom and human will, however strenuous their effort, cannot give, cannot command that power. The HOLY SPIRIT is the mighty power of GOD: it is only as the HOLY SPIRIT teaches you, only as the gospel is preached to you by man or by book, 'with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,' that it will really give you, with every command, the strength to obey, and work in you the very thing commanded.

With man, knowing and willing, knowing and doing, even willing and performing, are, for lack of power, often separate, and even at variance. Never in the HOLY SPIRIT. He is at once the light and the might of GOD. All He is and does and gives has in it equally the truth and the power of GOD. When He shows you GOD's command, He always shows it to you as a possible and a certain thing, a divine life and gift prepared for you, which He who shows is able to

impart.

Beloved Bible students! do learn to believe that it is only when CHRIST, through the HOLY SPIRIT, teaches you to understand and take the Word into your heart, that He can really teach you to obey as He did. Do believe, every time you open your Bible, that just as sure as you listen to the divine, Spirit-breathed Word, so surely will our Father, in answer to the prayer of faith and docile waiting, give the HOLY SPIRIT's living operation in your heart. Let all your Bible study be a thing of faith.

Do not only try and believe the truths or promises you read. This may be in your own power. Before that, believe in the HOLY SPIRIT, in His being in you, in GOD's working in you through Him. Take the Word into your heart, in the quiet faith that He will enable you to love it, and yield to it, and keep it; and our blessed Lord JESUS will make the book to you what it was to Him when He spoke of the *'things... which were written... concerning Me.'* All Scripture will become the simple revelation of what GOD is going to do for you, and in you, and through you.

III. THE PUPIL

We have seen how our Lord teaches us obedience by unfolding the secret of His learning it, in unceasing dependence on the Father. We have seen how He teaches us to use the Sacred Book as He used it, as a divine revelation of what GOD has ordained for us, with the HOLY SPIRIT to expound and enforce.

If we now consider the place the believer takes in the school of obedience as a pupil, we shall better understand what CHRIST the Son requires to do His work in us effectually.

In a faithful student there are several things that go to make up his feelings towards a trusted teacher. He submits himself entirely to his leading. He reposes perfect trust in him. He gives him just as much time and attention as he asks.

When we see and consent that JESUS CHRIST has a right to all this, we may hope to experience how wonderfully He can teach us an obedience like His own.

1. The true pupil, say of some great musician or painter, yields his master a whole-hearted and unhesitating submission.

In practicing his scales or mixing the colors, in the slow and patient study of the elements of his art, he knows that it is wisdom simply and fully to obey.

It is this whole-hearted surrender to His guidance, this implicit submission to His authority, CHRIST asks. We come to Him asking Him to teach us the lost art of obeying GOD as He did. He asks us if we are ready to pay the price. It is entirely and utterly to deny self! It is to give up our will and our life to the death! It is to be ready to do whatever He saith!

The only way of learning to do a thing is to do it. The only way of learning obedience from CHRIST is to give up your will to Him, and to make the doing of His will the one desire and delight of your heart.

Unless you take the vow of absolute obedience as you enter this class of CHRIST's school, it will be impossible for you to make any progress.

2. The true scholar of a great master finds it easy to render him this implicit obedience, simply because he trusts him.

He gladly sacrifices his own wisdom and will to be guided by a higher.

We need this confidence in our Lord JESUS. He came from Heaven to learn obedience, that He might be able to teach it well. His obedience is the treasury out of which, not only the debt of our past disobedience is paid, but out of which the grace for our present obedience is supplied.

In His divine love and perfect human sympathy, in His divine power over our hearts and lives, He invites, He deserves, He wins our trust. It is by the power of a personal admiration and attachment to Himself, it is by the power of His divine love, in every deed shed into our heart by the HOLY SPIRIT and wakening within us a responsive love, that He wakens our confidence, and communicates to us the true secret of success in His school. As absolutely as we have trusted Him as a Saviour to atone for our disobedience, so let us trust Him as a Teacher to lead us out of it.

CHRIST is our Prophet or Teacher. A heart that enthusiastically believes in His power and success as a Teacher, will, in the joy of that faith, find it possible and easy to obey. It is the presence of CHRIST with us all the day that will be the secret of true obedience.

3. A scholar gives his master just as much of his attendance and attention as he asks. The master fixes how much time must be devoted to personal intercourse and instruction.

Obedience to GOD is such a heavenly art, our nature is so utterly strange to it, the path in which the Son Himself learned it was so slow and long, that we must not wonder if it does not come at once. Nor must we wonder if it needs more time at the Master's feet in meditation, and prayer, and waiting, in dependence and self-sacrifice, than the most are ready to give. But let us give it.

In CHRIST JESUS heavenly obedience has become human again, obedience has become our birth-right and our life-breath: let us cling to Him, let us believe and claim His abiding presence. With JESUS CHRIST who learned obedience as our Saviour, with JESUS CHRIST who teaches obedience as our Master, we can live lives of obedience. His obedience - we cannot study the lesson too earnestly - His obedience is our salvation; in Him, the living CHRIST, we find it and partake of it moment by moment.

Let us beseech GOD to show us how CHRIST and His obedience are actually to be our life every moment: that will then make us pupils who give Him all our heart and all our time. And He will teach us to keep His commandments and abide in His love, even as He kept His Father's commandments and abides in His love.

~ end of chapter 3 ~
